

The Day of Pentecost
Acts 2:1-21
May 11, 2008
Kory Wilcoxson

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Pentecost was a festival 50 days after Passover during which the Jews celebrated the gift of the first five books of the Bible and the reaping of the spring harvest. Jews from around the region were gathered in Jerusalem for the festival, and many of them would have witnessed what happened to the disciples: the tornadic wind, the tongues of flame, the speaking in different languages. Even Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, took to the pulpit and delivered a speech so powerful that 3000 people were baptized.

I think it’s interesting that the Spirit appeared as fire. Fire was a common metaphor for God in the Hebrew Scriptures, but when it comes to the Holy Spirit, we tend to think more of wind, like when Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The wind blows

wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” But at Pentecost, the Spirit appears as another uncontrollable natural element. And what this tells us is that a person filled with the Spirit is a person who is on fire, who burns to serve God, who is able to bring light and warmth to a cold, dark world. A church filled with people on fire for God is the kind that attracts people to it. When a church is on fire with God’s Spirit, people want to see where the smoke is coming from.

In other words, a believer is a person who is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The observers at Pentecost thought the disciples were under the influence in a different way, but Peter clears that up by saying that these guys weren’t drunk on wine. They were under the influence of the Spirit. If you are a believer, the Spirit that is in you should influence what you say and do in your life.

Peter goes on to explain to the crowd how they will know the Spirit is at work within them. He says, “Your sons and daughters will prophesy.” You know what it means to prophesy? It means to tell someone what God will do. When Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied, they told the Israelites what God was going to do if they didn’t shape up. But prophesying isn’t only about proclaiming God’s judgment. Prophesying can also mean to share the good news of God’s work in our lives. I like the fact that Peter doesn’t say, “And your pastor, in his flowing robe and colorful stole, while standing behind a wooden pulpit, will prophesy.” It’s not only my job to preach. It’s yours, too.

The famous theologian Martin Luther once said, “Everyone, by virtue of baptism, is called to preach. All baptized Christians are expected to speak the Gospel to their neighbors, to testify to the mighty works of God, to tell people about Jesus. The thing is, on Sunday morning, we can’t all possibly speak at the same time and be understood, so some of the baptized are designated to be preachers. They are the ones who speak on Sunday morning so that the rest of us may speak about Jesus Monday through Saturday morning. The preacher preaches, so that the congregation may preach.”

The challenge you face is to take God’s word tomorrow into your homes, your neighborhoods, your businesses, your schools and share it with others. Not in an in-your-face, confrontational way. That won’t do anything but scare people off. The best way to share the power of Christ in your life with others is to tell them your story. Tell them what God has done for you. Tell them what the church has done for you. Invite them to come and see what God can do for them. You have the power to change lives with your story. Share it with others. Tell them about God’s work in your life. The Spirit has been poured out on you, and it’s pretty hard to stay quiet when you’re on fire.

How has being a believer changed your life? I can think of dozens of situations where being a part of this church has had a tremendous impact on someone’s life. I’ve seen it happen on mission trips, through our Stephen Ministry and Crisis Committee work, through the web of prayers that extend from this place. Lives are being changed as Christ works through us. People are smelling the smoke. Our challenge is not to stay quiet but to stay open to the Spirit’s working as it calls us in new and exciting directions.

God has not called us in this way without giving us the necessary equipment. The Bible makes the point repeatedly that the Spirit is very generous, because it’s given each of us a gift. I know, not only because the Bible tells me so, but also because I’ve seen it in each of you. Paul names several of these gifts: speaking in tongues, prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. These are not

personality traits or idiosyncrasies; these are gifts of the Holy Spirit. When you serve someone, when you teach someone, when you encourage them or show them compassion, you are letting God's Spirit work through you to touch the other person. You have that gift. And if you pass up a chance to teach, or to encourage, or to lead, how are you using the Spirit's gift in you?

A poet once wrote, "Sure as the sound of leaves rustling lets you know the wind is there, like the smell of smoke lets you know there's fire, an ever-expanding circle of believers lets you know the Spirit is there." We've been blessed to add 17 people to our church family in the last couple months. That's the Spirit at work through us. Our openness to the Holy Spirit's movement in our church will create an ever-expanding circle of believers, a community of faith, in which we can welcome people with love, in which we can equip people with a faith that works in real life, and in which we can share God's love for us through compassionate service to others.

Like the disciples at Pentecost, we are at a crossroads. As we implement a new constitution, as we move in new directions with our staff, the future is unknown. But we have the Holy Spirit, in us and around us, working with us and through us, calling us forward to do great things in the name of Christ. We each have God's Spirit in us, helping us know right from wrong, helping us live out our faith. If we each strive to do this individually, then collectively our gifts are multiplied exponentially. You have a gift. I dare you to dream about what we can do in God's name if we all share our gifts together. How many people can we help? How many people can we serve? How many lives can we change? Go ahead. Imagine. Think for a few seconds about what this church will look like if we stay open to God's Spirit. Picture it. Dream it. Vision it.

Wait...do you smell something burning? It's us. It's us.